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IMPRIMATUR,

March 6.  
1694.

. Guil. Lancaster.

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*The Characters of Divine Revelation.*

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A  
**S E R M O N**

Preached at

*St. Martins in the Fields, March 4. 169<sup>4</sup>.*

B E I N G T H E  
**Third of the L E C T U R E**

For the Ensuing Y E A R,

Founded by the Honourable

**ROBERT BOYLE, Esquire.**

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By **JOHN WILLIAMS, D. D.**

Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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**The Second Editton.**

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**L O N D O N :**

Printed for **Ri. Chiswell**, and **Tho. Cockerill** : At the *Rose*  
and *Crown* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard* ; and at the Corner of  
*Warwick-Lane* in *Pater-Noster-Rowe*. MDCXC VII.

The Characters of Divine Revelation.

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Preached at

St. Martin in the Fields, March 1694

BEING THE

Third of the LECTURES

For the Evening YEAR

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BY JOHN WILLIAMS, D.D.

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Printed for M. Coghlin, and J. Coghlin: At the Key  
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White-Lane in Finsbury-Park, MDCXCVII.



**H E B. I. 1, 2.**

*God who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.*



**I**N these Words there is, (as I have shewed)

**I.** A Description given of Revelation; 'tis Gods speaking, or declaring his Will to Mankind.

**II.** The Certainty of it; 'tis by way of Declaration, *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake, &c.* 'Tis taken for granted, and that it needs no Proof.

**III.** The Order observed in delivering this Revelation; it was at *sundry times, and in divers manners; in time past by the Prophets, and in the last days by his Son.*

**IV.** The Perfection and Conclusion of all; 'tis in the last days by his Son.

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Under the First I have shewed,

1. What is meant by Revelation, in contradiction to Natural Light.

2. The Possibility of it.

3. The Expediency, Usefulness, and Necessity of it.

Under the Second I have shewed,

1. The Certainty of it; or that there has been such a Revelation.

2. I shall now proceed to shew the Difference between Pretended and True Revelation; or what are the Characters by which we may know Revelation to be True.

In treating upon which, I shall premise,

1. That the proper Subject-matter of Revelation, called here *God's speaking*, being not self-evident, and out of the Road of Nature, requires some extraneous Principles to prove it by. Sensible Objects lye open to the Sense, and need no Proof; for who ever thought it necessary to labour in proving there is a Sun in the Heavens; that it rises and sets, and has its stated Times and Periods of Revolution; which every man that has his Eye-sight knows and sees as well as himself?

And

## The Characters of Divine Revelation. 3

And there are Rational Inferences which we make from precedent *Postulata*, that are as evident as the Principles from which they are deduced, and which all men alike agree in.

But in matters of mere Revelation, there is no manner of Connection between them and what we know before, and are therefore never to be wrought out, or learned by the Book of Nature or Reason ; but are only to be understood and known, as God is pleased to communicate them. We might search and search eternally, and yet never have found out the Mystery of our Redemption ; that Mystery of which not only the Prophets *enquired and searched diligently*, but also *the angels desire to look or pry into,  $\piαραβλεψαι$*  ; and were obliged to wait till the manifold wisdom of God was in its proper time made known to them by the Church, (as has been before suggested.)

1 Pet. 1.  
10.  
ver. 12.

Eph. 3.  
10.

This then being the Subject of Revelation, 'tis reasonable that this Revelation should have some other ways of Proof ; that what is thus Divine in its Discovery, should have a suitable Evidence to justify it.

2. The Matter of Revelation being thus of Divine Inspiration and Authority, must also be worthy of God, and of great Importance, and

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consequently requires a Proof suitable to the Nature and Importance of it.

If the Matter in debate be inconsiderable, we are contented with probable Arguments; nor are we much concerned which way it is determined: As 'tis indifferent whether the Sun or the Earth be the Centre, as long as we receive the benefit of both: Or whether our Diet nourishes, or Physick operates by Qualities, or the Texture of its parts, as long as we find the happy Effects of it: Let Philosophers and Naturalists write Volumes, and wrangle eternally about these disputable Points, I find not my self concerned, as long as my Interest is not affected nor concerned in the Quarrel. But when the matter is of no less consequence than my Eternal Happiness, it requires the most serious Thoughts and Attention to be satisfied which is the right, and which the wrong; whether there be a Revelation, or which is the true, and which the false; especially since there are different Pretenders to it.

3. Revelation being the Declaration of God's Will to Mankind, as he doth not require us to believe without sufficient Evidence, so it doth suppose that there is such Evidence, and that there are some Marks or Signs by which the Truth and Certainty of such Revelation may be known  
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and proved. For otherwise every Pretender to Revelation would challenge our belief; and we should not know but that the True Revelation might be the False, and the False the True.

4. There are some things so necessary and inseparably belonging to Revelation, that the want of them will utterly overthrow the Veracity and Authority of it, and yet without further Evidence they are not sufficient to prove it: Of this kind are Self-agreement, a Consonancy to the Principles of Nature, and to the true and certain Notions of Mankind concerning Good and Evil. We are certain if a Revelation fails in any one or more of these, that it is false, and not of Divine Inspiration: For the Light of Nature, and a true and right notion of things, are from God; and to suppose a Revelation to be opposite to these, is to make God contradict himself. Thus if we understand any thing, we know God to be infinitely Good and Holy, worthy of the profoundest and most solemn Adoration, because of the Perfections of his Nature, and his Goodwill and Beneficence to Mankind: And therefore to sacrifice Men and Children, and to mingle the most Impure and Ludicrous Practices with the Worship paid to him, is rather an Offering to be presented to the most Beastly and Savage Demons,

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than the Holy and Merciful Creator of all things; and consequently cannot be of his Institution. In this case a contradiction in the Nature of things, would be like a Contradiction in Terms, or a Contradiction in the Revelation it self: And therefore a Revelation that shall evidently contradict them, is a Revelation in Pretence only, it is not Divine.

But though these are thus necessary to Revelation, that the want of them is sufficient to detect what is false; yet however it will not follow, That where-ever these are [that because a Sum of Doctrine agrees with it self, is consonant to the Light of Nature, and the right notion we have of things] that it is therefore of Divine Revelation. For though it is seldom but the Imposture fails in one or more of these, yet it may have all these Characters, and be a Doctrine of Men, of human Contrivance and Composure.

And therefore there is somewhat farther requisite to the proof of a Revelation, somewhat peculiar to it, and that so belongs to it, as not to be common to any thing with it.

And that is a Point I shall now take into Consideration: Toward the clearer Proof of which I shall distribute what I have to say after a Threefold manner.

1. I shall



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1. I shall consider the case of such as were themselves inspired, and to whom the Revelation was made, and how they could be satisfied of the Truth of such a Revelation.

2. The case of those that received the matter revealed immediately from the Persons inspired, and how they were to judge of the Truth of such a Revelation.

3. The case of those that lived in Ages remote from that of the Inspired Persons, and after that the Revelation was compleated, (as was the case of the *Jews* more especially that lived between the time of *Malachi*, and *John* the Baptist; and as the case is of all Christians since the Apostolical times) and what Satisfaction and Evidence there may be expected in those Circumstances.

1. The Case of those that received the Revelation; and how they themselves could be satisfied about the Certainty of such a Revelation.

The Resolution of this Point belongs in part to the Third General, under which the Difference remains to be shewed between a Revelation and Imagination. But I shall not wholly refer it thither.

There seems to be so near an Affinity between Revelation and Imagination in some things, that it may be thought very difficult to set out the bounds exactly, and to say, This is of Divine In-

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spiration, and this the effect of Imagination.

But whatever it may seem to us that have no Sensation or Experience of such Divine Representations as the Prophets had ; and so 'tis no more possible for us to describe it, than 'tis for one that never had his Sight, to conceive what Light and Colour is : Yet as the blind man may be convinced that there are such things as Light, Colour, Figure, and Sight, by what he hears and observes from those that are about him, and that he converses with : So we may be as well assured that there was in Prophetical Schemes that powerful Representation on the part of the Divine Agent, and that clearness of Perception on the part of the Person Inspired, as would abundantly make good those Phrases of *Vision* and *Speaking*, by which it is described in Scripture ; and which may well be supposed as much more to advantage, as the Power that operated upon them was beyond that of mere Imagination. So that those Inspired Persons after such Illumination, might as well question what they heard or saw by the Natural Organs of Sense, as doubt of what was revealed to them by the Impressions made upon them through the Agency of the Divine Spirit.

To deny this, is to deny that God can so communicate

municate himself to an Intelligent Creature, that the Creature shall certainly know that it proceeds from his immediate Suggestion; which I have before shewed it is unreasonable to question: And indeed what is no more to be questioned or denied because we our selves have no experience of it, than the Blind from their Birth can reasonably question or deny there is what we call Light and Colour; or the Deaf, that there are Sounds, Voices, and Words, because they have no Notion or Idea of these things. Now if we think it reasonable that the Deaf and the Blind should notwithstanding a Natural Inaptitude and Incapacity in themselves, assent to what all Mankind besides do unanimously aver, and not call in question the Truth or Possibility of what is thus affirmed, because of their want of such a Sensation: So it is not fit or reasonable to think this way of Revelation never was, and cannot be, because we our selves have not an experimental knowledge of such a Manifestation.

For Almighty God can so clarify the Understanding by a Beam of Light let in from above, as shall be as evident a Proof of its Divine Original, as it is that the Light proceeds from the Sun the Fountain of it; or as a Person himself is sure of the Truth of any Proposition, which by  
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an Argument before unthought of, or unconsider'd, he comes to be fully convinced of, in spite of all former Prejudices and Opinions.

*Theol. Polit. c. 2.* So little Truth or Reason is there in a bold Assertion of a certain Author, That *Revelation is uncertain, and never certain without a sign*: And therefore, saith he, *Abraham, Moses, and Gideon*, asked a Sign, over and above Revelation.

*Heb. 6. 17.* But it is far from being true, that those persons therefore desired a Sign, because they conceived the Revelation to be uncertain, or that they doubted of the truth of it; but as a Sign was for the greater confirmation of their Faith, in some Points difficult to be believed, or in some very difficult Services, (for Faith, as other Graces, is capable of Addition and Improvement.) In which cases their asking a Sign is no more an evidence of their distrust of God, or a doubting of the Truth and Certainty of the Revelation, than God's confirming his Promise by an Oath, was an evidence that he thought not his Word sufficient without it; or than *Abraham* could be supposed not obliged to believe upon a Promise alone, without that superabundant confirmation of an Oath.

Thus it was even in the case of that Holy Patriarch, to which this Author refers; where before ever he asked a Sign, he is said to have so believed in

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in the Lord, that it was counted to him for righteousness; his Faith was highly commended, and he is for that reason called the father of them that believe. Gen. 15. 6.  
Rom. 4. 11.

So that Revelation may be certain when there is no Sign; and the person was bound to believe it, and was obliged by it, as well where there was no Sign, as where there was.

I grant when the Revelation comes at second hand to a person, and rests on Human Testimony, on the Ability and Sincerity of the Relater, or person supposed to be inspired, there needs some farther Evidence, some Sign or Signs, that are to be, as it were, the Credentials from Heaven; since *all men are liars*, that is, may be deceived, or may deceive; may either be so weak as to be imposed upon by their own Imagination, or by the Imposture and Practices of Evil Spirits; or be so wicked, as under the pretence of Revelation and Inspiration, to impose upon others. In such a case, no man's Affirmation or Pretence is ordinarily to be heeded further than as he is able to produce such Testimonies as are really as Divine as he would have his Revelation accounted to be. Psalm 116. 11.

But when a person is himself the Recipient to whom the Revelation is imparted, there is no ab-

absolute need of a Sign or further Evidence to ascertain the Truth of it to him ; when if God so pleases , the Revelation of it self might be made as clear as it could be made by the Sign. What need is there of a sign to prove that it is Day, when by the Light of it we see every thing about us? Or to justify the Truth of a self evident Proposition? These are things that in their own nature need no proof. And when a Revelation has an Evidence of its own, as Truth has, it needs no other Light to discover it, no further Sign to prove it, for its own sake, and as to the Person to whom the Revelation is made. A Sign therefore makes no alteration in the Evidence ; for whether with a Sign, or without a Sign, the Revelation is to be believed ; or else they that had a Revelation without a Sign, were not obliged to believe, and the Revelation without the Sign had in effect been no Revelation ; since no one is obliged to believe, where there is no reason for it ; and there is no reason for it, where there is no Evidence, or that Evidence not sufficient.

So that if it be asked, how a person shall himself be satisfied concerning the Certainty of a Revelation made to him , it will receive the same answer with that, How he shall be satisfied



fied concerning the Truth of a Proposition, or a self-evident Proposition ; for the further Proof of which God may work a Miracle, and give a Sign, but the thing is the Proof of it self.

But however, suppose a person never so well satisfied in what he calls Revelation, and that in his own opinion he is as sure of it as of his own Being and Existence ; yet what is this to others, that are concerned in that Revelation, if it be true, and as much bound to believe it, and be directed by it, as if they themselves had been in the place of that Inspired Person, and received it as he did, immediately from God ?

This brings us to the Second Case.

2. The Case of those that did not themselves receive that Revelation immediately from God, but from the Person or Persons Inspired : And then the Question is, How these are to judge of the Truth of that Revelation ?

A Revelation to another, how evidently and convincingly soever it may be represented to him, is nothing to me, unless I am fully assured that he has had such a Revelation : But that I cannot be assured of, unless it be by the like immediate Revelation, or by sufficient and uncontrollable Testimony. But it would be an un-

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reasonable motion to demand that we be alike inspired, and have the same Revelation to confirm his Revelation ; for that would be as if one that was born blind should obstinately refuse to believe there is a Sun in the Firmament, or Day, or Sight, unless he has the same Visive Faculty with those that do affirm it. It might then as  
Joh. 20. reasonably be required with *Thomas*, that we see  
25. the Print of the Nails, and put our hand into the Side, and have all actually brought home to our Senses, or else we will remain Infidels, and not believe. This would be to drive all Faith out of the world, and so it would be unpracticable.

We must then take the Case for granted, and that it is as reasonable for us to believe, where there are sufficient Motives of Credibility, as if we were alike actually inspired as they to whom the Revelation was immediately conveyed.

And here let us place our selves in those circumstances, as if we were to judge of the Truth or Falshood of a Revelation ; and consider what we our selves would in reason desire for our own satisfaction, when the Persons to whom this Revelation is made, stand ready to give it. And if I mistake not in judging for others by what I my self would desire, it may be resolved,

1. Into the Veracity, Sincerity, and Credibility of the Persons pretending to Inspiration.
2. Into the Matter or Subject of Revelation.
3. Into the Testimony produced for it.

(1.) The Credibility of the Person; by which we understand his Probity and Sincerity; his Capacity, Prudence, and Understanding, which render him worthy of Credit, and are meet and necessary Qualifications for a Divine Missionary. The being a Prophet to others, (as those are to whom a Revelation is made, and that are inspired by Almighty God) so as to teach and direct them in the stead, as it were, of God, whose Mouth and Representatives they are unto the People, is an Office of great Dignity, and requires somewhat of the Divine Image as well as Authority, to recommend them and their Message to others; and therefore Prophets and Holy Men are in Scripture frequently put together; <sup>2 Pet. 1.</sup> implying that none were fit to be employed in <sup>21.</sup> so sacred an Office, that were not Persons of <sup>Matt. 13.</sup> known Probity, and approved Integrity. I <sup>17.</sup> grant in the ordinary Cases, as there were Prophets bred up in the Schools or Nurseries of Learning and Morality, there might be such Persons as were employed without a strict regard

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had to these qualifications, as Messengers that carried an Errand by the order of their Superior; as *2 Kings 9. 1.* I grant again, that God might and did sometimes upon some occasions, inspire such Persons as had none of these Qualifications to recommend them; as he did *Balaam*: But then this was no more than when God opened the Mouth of the Ais, to *rebuke the Madness of that Prophet*; and who was so over ruled by the Divine Power, as against his will to bless those whom he came to curse; which was so much the more considerable, as it was the Testimony of an Enemy.

But as Revelation is a Divine Communication, and a Mark of Divine Favour; so it doth suppose in the nature of it, that the Person so dignified is duly qualified for it; and which is so requisite in the opinion of mankind, that without it he would rather be accounted an Impostor, than a Messenger from God, and ordinarily have no more Reverence paid to his Errand than to his Person.

And what has been thus said in general, as to the Morality and Virtue of Persons inspired, will hold in some degree as to their Prudence and Understanding, which is so necessary a Qualification, that the Divine Election of Persons for so peculiar a Service, doth in that way either find or make them fit.

It is no wonder that a late Author maintains Revelation to be uncertain, when he saith that the Prophets were not endued with a more perfect Understanding than others, but only with a more Vivid Power of Imagination; and that the Wisest of Men, such as *Solomon*, and *Heman*, &c. were not Prophets, but contrariwise Rusticks, and untaught Persons, and even despicable Women, such as *Hagar*. *Theol. Polit. c. 2.*

For if these and such as these were the only Persons employed in the Messages of Heaven to Mankind, and whom all the Revelation center'd in, there would be no improbable grounds of suspicion that they were misled into such an Opinion, by the Fascination of a working Imagination, and so it would be Fancy; and not Revelation.

But what thinks he of *Moses*, a Person acquainted with all the Learning of the *Egyptians*, and richly accomplish'd with all Endowments requisite to compleat a Governor of a Numerous People, and to consolidate them into a settled Constitution; and therefore has the Preference given him to all the most Famous and Ancient Lawgivers, by some of the Wisest and most Learned of the Heathens? What thinks he of *Joshua*, that was bred up under the best

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best Instructor, and that knew the Art of Government and Conduct in Peace and War? What of *Samuel*, that from his Youth, and even Childhood indeed, commenced a Prophet, and was also afterwards the Judge of the whole Nation in unsettled and perilous times? What of *David*, justly called a Prophet, and whose Writings shew him to excel in all manner of Poetry and sublime Composures? What, lastly, of *Solomon* himself, to whom, it's said, the Lord appeared twice, in a more eminent manner; and at other times? And if at other times God (who is not confin'd in his Choice or Operations to the Capacity of Instruments) was pleased to reveal himself to, and employ such Rusticks and Illiterate Persons as *Amos*, and afterward the Apostles; he gave them a *mouth and wisdom*, and endued them with such extraordinary Gifts of Elocution and Magnanimity, as made them fit to appear before Kings, and to confront the Wisest of Philosophers; so as that of the Apostle was abundantly verified in them, That *the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men, &c.*

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Bnt it is not only requisite that the Persons to whom the Revelation is made, and that are employ'd in delivering that Revelation to others, be Wise and Cautious, such as are capable of discerning, and not apt to be imposed upon; but it is as requisite that they be Faithful and Sincere, and that will not impose upon others: For otherwise the more knowing they are, the more able are they by plausible Insinuations and Pretences to deceive. And what greater Evidence of this can be desired, than when the Persons Inspired live by the best Rules, as well as give them? What greater Evidence, than when for the sake of publishing, propagating, and confirming the Truth of what they teach, they deny themselves of all the Pleasures, Profits, and Honours of this present life; when though they knew before-hand, that *bonds and tribulation abide* Acts 20. *them, yet none of these things move them, neither count* 23, 24. *they their lives dear unto them;* but with admirable Patience, Resolution, and Constancy, expose themselves to the utmost Severities, for the hope of such Reward as they propose for their own, and the Encouragement of others? What greater Testimonies can be given of their Sincerity, and if not of the Truth, yet of their own Belief of it? Who could with such Chearfulness invite

invite the greatest Dangers, and with such a brave Magnanimity despise all the threatnings of the most Potent Adversaries, and run the Gantelope, as it were, through the most formidable Persecutions, without the least Demur or Hæsitati<sup>o</sup>n, if they themselves were not abundantly and fully convinced of the Truth, Excellency, and Necessity of that Doctrine they were thus commission'd to teach? If these are not sincere, there is no Sincerity in the world.

So that as far as the Credibility of the Persons is a Proof of a Revelation; and so far as the Wisdom, Probity, and Sincerity of Persons, are a Proof of their Credibility; we have an Evidence to rest upon, and a Character to try the Truth of a Revelation by.

(2.) The 2<sup>d</sup>. Proof in this Case, desirable and necessary toward a Satisfaction, is the Subject-matter of it; I mean that which runs as a Vein through the whole Body of Revelation. There are some Revelations which concern particular Persons or Families, as that of the Angel to *Hagar*, concerning *Ishmael* and his Posterity, which neither made her a Prophet, nor were strictly of Concernment to the rest of the world. But when we enquire after the Matter of Revelation,

Gen. 21.  
17, 18.

lation, it is principally the main Subject of it, such as the Law of *Moses* in the Old Testament, and the Gospel in the New.

And here it may be reasonably expected, that the Revelation should be worthy of God, as it is a Revelation from him; and what should be for the Advantage, Satisfaction, and Happiness of Mankind, as it is a Revelation to them.

It is to be worthy of God, and what would become him to speak, dictate, and do, if he were himself to speak, dictate, and act. In all Relations and Descriptions there is a certain Decorum to be observed, with respect to the Nature, Condition, and Circumstances of the Things related and described, which makes up what is called Symmetry and Proportion. But above all a due regard is to be had hereunto, in the Ideas and Notions we entertain, or the Representations we make of God, that they may be agreeable to the Dignity and Perfections of his Nature. And if in all our Conceptions of the Divine Being such a scrupulous Care is to be taken, that we judge not amiss of his Nature, Will, and Operations; we cannot but suppose that in the Revelation of himself to Mankind, he who best and only knows himself, will give such a Representation of those, as is suitable to his Majesty and Authority;



city ; and may ingenerate in the minds of men such an Awe, Reverence, and Regard, as is due from Finite, Created, and Imperfect Beings, to him that is Infinite, Uncreated, and in all Points absolutely Perfect. There we may well expect to find the most lively Characters of the Divine Perfections, as far as we are capable of conceiving ; where Justice and Power are set forth in all their Authority, and yet so temper'd with his Mercy and Kindness, as shall as well raise and quicken the Hopes, attract the Love, and establish the Comfort of Good Men, as administer matter of just Terror to the Wicked. There we may suppose the Mysteries of the Divine Counsels unlocked, and the Beauties and Harmony of the Divine Providence illustrated and described, as far as God's Government of the World, and the condition of Mankind in it will permit. There we may expect to find the best Principles, Rules, and Precepts, to inform and direct us in what we are to know and do ; the best Arguments and Motives for our Encouragement, and the best Means for the purifying and the perfecting of our Natures, and the making us as happy as we are capable ; and which shall as much exceed what we find in the Moralists, as Revelation is above Nature, and the Dictates of Almighty

ty God are beyond the Prescripts of Human Wisdom. Such, in fine, as will lead us to God, make us like to him, and fit us for the enjoyment of him. So that as much as Virtue makes for the Good, Perfection, and Happiness of Men, so much should Revelation make for the Practice of Virtue by its Principles and Rules, its Precepts and its Arguments.

Lastly, There we may expect to be satisfied about the chief Subjects of Human Enquiry, of what Mankind would not only desire, but what is best and most necessary for them to know. And what is there more material, and of greater Importance, than to be satisfied about the Origine of all things, and how they came at first to be? What more desirable, than since God is infinitely good, and consequently could produce nothing that is in it self evil, than to know how the Nature of Mankind came to be corrupted; and that where there is such a clear sense of the difference between good and evil, such Convictions following that Sense, such Memento's, and such Presignifications, such Reflections upon it, that there should be such a Potent Sway, Bent and propension to Evil, that with all their Care it can never be wholly prevented, or totally exterminated?

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Rom. 7. 19. What more desirable, than to know what Nature and Reason of it self is insufficient for [ when we can get no farther than a *Video meliora proboque, &c.* in the Apostle's Language, *The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do* ] may be otherwise effected; that these Inclinations may be subdued, and corrupted Nature brought to a Regular State?

What more desirable, than to know how after all, God may be appeased, Forgiveness may be obtained, and that heavy load upon Human Nature, arising from the Guilt of a Man's Mind, may be removed?

Lastly, What more desirable, than to know the Certainty and Condition of a Future State, and how we may attain to the Happiness of it?

These and the like, used to be the Prime Questions which all, and especially the most thoughtful and considerate part of Mankind sought, but in vain, for Satisfaction in. And therefore since Revelation is to make up the Defects of Natural Light, and is as well for the satisfaction of Mankind, as to be worthy of God, we may reasonably expect that these should be the chief Subject of such Revelation.

And a Revelation without this, that should leave Mankind in the same Circumstances of Ignorance.



Ignorance and Dissatisfaction as they were in before such Revelation, is no more to be esteemed, than that Course of Physick, which after all Pretences to Infallibility, leaves a Person as much under the Power of his Dilease, as before he followed those Prescriptions: It is no Revelation, and can have no Pretence to such a Venerable Title.

But when the Subject is Great, Noble, and Sublime, thus worthy of God, and thus beneficial to Mankind: When there is an exact Concord between the Principles of Nature and Reason, and that all falls in with the true and just Notion we have of things: When there is an Harmony through the whole, we have good reason to say, This, if any, is the Revelation.

And as far as these Characters belong to Revelation, so much reason have we to believe the Matter of Scripture to be such; as I shall afterwards shew, when I come to examine the Revelation of Scripture by these Characters.

(3.) It would be very desirable toward the Confirmation of a Revelation, and for the Satisfaction of those that are required to believe it, that there be an Evidence and Testimony as Extraordinary, as the Matter Revealed is, and the Authority it rests upon; such as the one is, such  
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in reason ought the other to be: And that is Divine Attestation. A Divine Attestation I account that to be, which exceeds the Power, and is out of the Road of Nature; for nothing less can change the Course, and alter the Law of Nature, but that which is above Nature, and gave Law to it; and it must be somewhat above Nature, that can be a sufficient Witness to what is Supernatural. And this may justly be required to justify the Truth of a Revelation, and to distinguish it from Enthusiasm and Imposture. For when the Case is such as *Moses* puts it,

Exod. 4. *They will not believe me, nor hearken to my voice;*  
 1, &c. *for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee;* there needs somewhat beyond a bare Affirmation, to support the Credit of the Revelation, and the Authority of him that pretends to it. And accordingly, he was endued with a Power of working Miracles, *That, saith the Text there, they may believe that the God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared to thee.* A sort of Evidence (as that implies) that is in such a case very necessary, and what may reasonably be demanded; and which is a Proof of the highest nature, and what as all men ordinarily can judge of, being a matter of Sense, so where it is true, it is what we are then to be concluded by.

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The first thing then required and to be considered, is the Reality of the thing, That there is such an Alteration in the Course and State of Nature, which our own Senses will inform us in. The next thing is, That this Alteration cannot proceed from any Natural or Created Cause; (for that would be to set Nature above it self.) The last thing is, That this Alteration in Nature is brought about for such an end, and is solely for the sake of that Revelation, and to give Testimony to it.

Where this is, there is the Finger of God, and an Infallible Proof of the Truth and Certainty of what it is to witness to.

Now let us lay all this together, and see what it amounts to; *viz.* The Capacity, Ability, and Integrity of the Persons to whom this Revelation is made; the Unanimity and Consent of persons remote and distant in Time and Place; the Usefulness and Reasonableness, the Excellency, Sublimity, and Perfection of the Doctrine they taught; the Testimony given to them by such Operations and Productions as exceed the Power of Created Causes, and are wholly from the Supreme. Where these are concurring, and with one mouth, as it were, giving in their Evidence, we may say it is the Voice of God, and that



that it is his Revelation which carries upon it the conspicuous Stamp of his Authority. For God cannot be suppos'd to bear witness to a Falshood, and to set up that as a Light to direct men in their Enquiry, which is no other than an *Ignis Fatuus*, and tends to their unavoidable Amusement and Deception.

But supposing those that were Coterporaries with Inspired persons, had all these concurring Evidences for their satisfaction, yet what is this to those that live in Times distant and remote from them, and have it only by Tradition of Persons uninspired; or as contained in certain Books said to be wrote by Persons inspired?

This brings me to the last Point, which is,

3. The Case of those that live in After-Ages, when Inspiration is not pretended to, and Miracles have ceased, and so want those Advantages for their Satisfaction, which they that were coetaneous with Inspired persons, might receive; and yet being obliged alike to believe as the other, must be supposed to have sufficient Authority and Proof for what they are to believe. And then the Question is, What is that Evidence which will be sufficient for them to ground their Belief upon?



I answer 1. That if such have all the Evidence that can be in their Circumstances, they have what is sufficient, and what is to be presumed necessary. The Evidence is sufficient, if it proves there were Persons so Inspired; that in confirmation of it they wrought Miracles; and that those Persons wrote certain Books which contain the Records of those Revelations and Miracles; and which Books are the same that now go under their Name.

And if they have all the Evidence for this that in their Circumstances can be reasonably demanded, they have that which is sufficient. And what Evidence can be given of Matters transacted 1600 Years ago, but Testimony, and what is usually called Moral Evidence? A way of Proof that is as certain as that we our selves were born, and born of such Parents, at such a time; and that there is any such thing as Faith and Trust in Mankind.

2. Though these of After-Ages want the Evidence those Cotemporaries of Inspired persons had; yet they have some Advantages above them. For they have not only the concurrent Evidence of all before them, and the Reasons of their Judgment that have been downwards from those times the most considerable part of Man-  
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kind for Wisdom and impartial Consideration, but having lived to see the whole Scheme of Revelation compleated, and at once plac'd in their view,

1. They can by that means compare one part with the other, and see how all agrees, and makes up one entire and coherent Body.

2. They can compare the Events already pass'd, with the Predictions, and see how all came on, and in their season are fulfilled, and how the former is still confirmed by the latter. In all which there appears an admirable Contrivance of the Divine Prescience, in describing those things so long before hand, and of the Divine Wisdom and Power in carrying on the Prophetick Line through all the Stages of Second Causes, and an Infinite Variety of Events, to the last Moment of its Accomplishment, and to all which a watchful Providence of the Almighty must constantly attend.

3. They have seen the Wonderful Success of the Gospel in Verification of Prophecy; and notwithstanding all the Opposition made to it by the Power and Interest of the World, back'd with the Venom, Spite, and Malice of inveterate Enemies.

4. They have seen the Wonderful Preservation of it through all the various Scenes of Prosperity and Adversity, and how miraculously it has been restored out of the lowest Abyss, when seem

seemingly, and as to all outward appearance, beyond Recovery.

So that we see how in every Case there are ways chalked out for our Satisfaction in this Argument of a Divine Revelation; the Case of Latter Ages not excepted: And therefore, That Unbelief is now as inexcusable after the Times of Revelation, as in those times.

We are apt to think, and sometimes to plead, That if we had liv'd in the Apostolical Age, when the Revelation was attended with the irrefragable Testimony of many Glorious Miracles, we should then have been inexcusable, if we had remained incredulous amidst those Instances of the Divine Power, or impenitent under the Force of such convincing Arguments; and that the want of these may justly be pleaded for our Excuse. But this is much like those Jews, *Matth. 23. 30.* that said, *If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets;* when yet they were acted by the same Spirit. And I may say, Those that believe not now under all the Motives of Credibility, would not have believed, any more than the Jews did, that were Eye and Ear-Witnesses of our Saviour's Miracles and Doctrine, and yet remained to the last Incredulous.

Such

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32      *The Characters of Divine Revelation.*

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Luke 16.  
31. Such are incurable; for if they hear not *Moses* and the *Prophets*, the *Testimonies* yet remaining, neither would they be persuaded, though *Christ* and the *Apostles* rose from the dead, and the whole *Process* of that *Testimony* given by them was afresh represented to them. The *Best Man* is the best *Judge*; and the better he is, the more capable he is of *Judging*; according to that memorable *Saying* of our *Saviour*, *If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

John 7.  
17. Wherefore (to conclude with that of the *Apo-*  
James 1.  
21. *stle*) lay apart all *filthiness* and *superfluity* of *naughti-*  
*ness*, and receive with *meekness* [and *humility*] the *ingrafted word*, which is able to *save your souls*. But be ye *doers* of the word, and not *hearers* only, *deceiving your own selves*.

F I N I S.



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Dr *WILLIAMS*'s  
FOURTH SERMON

AT

Mr. BOYLE'S Lecture,

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